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**Authors:** Bradley, Bill

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**Abstract:** The article discusses the 2012 U.S. presidential election and the need for voters to become better informed on the issues and avoid being coerced by political rhetoric. The author argues that the success of the Tea Party movement in the 2010 U.S. elections is a good example of how voters in the U.S. can quickly change the nation's political landscape. The failure of the Occupy Movement to have the same type of impact on U.S. democracy is also mentioned.

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**Citizens United**

## Commentary

**Monied interests increasingly run the government. Only voters can reverse that**

In November 2008, on election night in Chicago, we made the mistake of believing that a leader can renew the country all by himself. Even someone who touched our hearts as deeply as Barack Obama cannot do it alone. A President can inspire and help mobilize us, but then you need the lieutenants and sergeants who make the dream operational. Clarity from leaders is necessary but not sufficient. Only when it is joined with commitment from citizens can great things happen. Democracy is not a vicarious experience.

In our current circumstances, our government is in danger of becoming a tool of entrenched and moneyed interests. Only the people can free our government from the clutches of those interests and put the country on the path to renewal. In the Internet age, apathy should not be an option. Citizens have to vote; for many, the vote is their most effective voice. But to vote wisely, citizens must take the time to become informed. Otherwise the future will be hijacked by a combination of greed, self-indulgence and excuse-making. The government will no longer belong to the people, and the people will suffer.

The Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street offer contrasting examples of citizen involvement. The Tea Party promulgated a very specific objective--roll back government--and immediately converted its energy into electoral politics. The result was that in 2010, 49 Tea Party Republicans won election to Congress. Through their leverage in the Republican caucus, they almost forced the country into bankruptcy during the debate on the debt limit in the summer of 2011. That's how quickly things can change. That's how easily the status quo can crumble. Occupy, on the other hand, while full of passion and solidarity and armed with a catchy slogan--"We're the 99%"--failed to have much of an impact on policy because it had no specific objective. Some people argued that it was enough simply to point out inequality; a detailed program would have divided the movement. I say, better than an emotional movement that hesitates to develop a specific program is a specific program--like getting money out of politics--that attracts emotion to it. Whether we like it or not, passion only goes partway. Remember Martin Luther King Jr. and LBJ. It took both of them, working together as they did, to transform America in the 1960s.

So how do these thoughts reflect on 2012? To begin, citizens should insist on a presidential campaign about the future, not a blamefest about the past. Candidates' narratives can have a historical dimension about how we got where we are, but the bulk of their story must be about the future. If what you hear is only blame or bromides, change the channel. Haven't we had enough of those two things over the past 12 years?

Without leaders who level with the people about what needs to be done and how long it will take, there is no way to build support for the tough decisions necessary to solve our problems. People are tired of seeing moneyed interests dominate the House of Representatives--the people's house. They're tired of narrow interests raiding the U.S. Treasury in collusion with members of Congress who, when they leave office, are employed as lobbyists by the very industries whose interests they promoted in Congress. (The same applies in spades to congressional staff.) They're tired of seeing their Presidents appear at fundraisers and hedge their bets and compromise their beliefs to raise campaign money. People are tired of being taken for granted. They yearn for leaders who will level with them, not pander to them.

Now is the time for citizens to insist on answers to real questions and for the media to serve the public more diligently than they serve their advertisers. Now is the time for follow-up questions and enough airtime for candidates to lay out their programs. What, specifically, will they do about jobs, the deficit, political corruption? How do they see America's role in the world? Now is the time for politicians to show us that they are more interested in doing something than in being somebody. There is a great difference between a leader and a celebrity. The nation has had enough of politicians fascinated with celebrity. What we need are courageous leaders who serve the public and not themselves, who devise a plan to save the country and fight for it because they know that the well-being of millions of Americans is at stake.

PHOTO (COLOR)

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE)

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By Bill Bradley

Bradley, a former three-term Democratic Senator from New Jersey, is the author of *We Can All Do Better*